LOST SISTER

1

In China,
even the peasants
named their first daughters
Jade—

the stone that in the far fields
could moisten the dry season,
could make men move mountains
for the healing green of the inner hills
glistening like slices of winter melon.

And the daughters were grateful:
they never left home.
To move freely was a luxury
stolen from them at birth.
Instead, they gathered patience,

learning to walk in shoes
the size of teacups,
without breaking—
the arc of their movements
as dormant as the rooted willow,

as redundant as the farmyard hens.
But they traveled far
in surviving,
learning to stretch the family rice,
to quiet the demons,

2

There is a sister
across the ocean,
who relinquished\(^1\) her name,
diluting jade green

with the blue of the Pacific.

\(^1\) relinquished — gave up; surrendered
Rising with a tide of locusts, 
she swarmed with others 
to inundate another shore. 
In America, 
35 there are many roads 
and women can stride along with men.

But in another wilderness, 
the possibilities, 
the loneliness, 
40 can strangulate like jungle vines. 
The meager provisions and sentiments 
of once belonging—
eremented roots, Mah-Jongg\(^2\) tiles and firecrackers—
set but a flimsy household 
45 in a forest of nightless cities. 
A giant snake rattles above, 
spewing black clouds into your kitchen. 
Dough-faced landlords 
slip in and out of your keyholes, 
50 making claims you don’t understand, 
tapping into your communication systems 
of laundry lines and restaurant chains.

You find you need China: 
your one fragile identification, 
55 a jade link 
handcuffed to your wrist. 
You remember your mother 
who walked for centuries, 
footless—

and like her, 
you have left no footprints, 
but only because 
there is an ocean in between, 
the unremitting space of your rebellion.

—Cathy Song

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\(^2\) Mah-Jongg — a game played with small pieces called tiles

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